

## Fermilab Book and Munch Club

Hi Everyone!

Based on various suggestions from other book clubs, I've organized the following readings and dates for a Spring 2015 Fermilab Village Book and Munch Club. All are selections focused on women's issues and are either non-fiction or fiction with meetings spaced one month apart on Monday mornings. I've cited the cost of the books via amazon.com if you'd like to purchase the books rather than borrow from a library.

We'll need a facilitator and a person willing to bring a themed snack for each meeting, so please let me know asap if you are interested in either of these important roles. Please confirm that you'll be able to participate in this fun winter activity.

Warmly,

Irma Padamsee

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### **Book #1: Monday, February, 16, 9:30-11:30am**

**Wild by Cheryl Strayed, non-fiction 2013, 315 pages, \$10 amazon**

**Review:** At age 26, following the death of her mother, divorce, and a run of reckless behavior, Cheryl Strayed found herself alone near the foot of the Pacific Crest Trail--inexperienced, over-equipped, and desperate to reclaim her life. *Wild* tracks Strayed's personal journey on the PCT through California and Oregon, as she comes to terms with devastating loss and her unpredictable reactions to it. While readers looking for adventure or a naturalist's perspective may be distracted by the emotional odyssey at the core of the story, *Wild* vividly describes the grueling life of the long-distance hiker, the ubiquitous perils of the PCT, and its peculiar community of wanderers. Others may find her unsympathetic--just one victim of her own questionable choices. But Strayed doesn't want sympathy, and her confident prose stands on its own, deftly pulling both threads into a story that inhabits a unique riparian zone between wilderness tale and personal-redemption memoir. --[Jon Foro](#)

### **Book #2: Monday, March 16, 9:30-11:30am**

**I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban, non-fiction 2015, 350 pages, \$12.50 amazon**

**Review:** "Riveting.... Co-written with Christina Lamb, a veteran British journalist who has an evident passion for Pakistan and can render its complicated history with pristine clarity, this is a book that should be read not only for its vivid drama but for its urgent message about the untapped power of girls.... It is difficult to imagine a chronicle of a war more moving, apart from perhaps the diary of Anne Frank. With the essential difference that we lost that girl, and by some miracle, we still have this one."—*Marie Arana, Washington Post*

### **Book #3: Monday, April 13, 9:30-11:30am**

**The Wives of Los Alamos by TaraShea Nesbitt, novel 2014, 240 pages, \$13 amazon**

**Review:** Written in the first person plural--the collective "we"--TaraShea Nesbitt's debut is both understated and poetic as it describes the lives of the women who accompanied their scientist husbands to the American desert to work on a secret project that turned out to be the making of the atomic bomb. "We were Western women born in California and Montana, East Coast women born in Connecticut and New York, Midwestern women born in Nebraska and Ohio. . ." Nesbitt writes, and so they were: all different, of course, and yet much the same as they came to bear and raise children, and make lives in a dangerous and secretive time and place. What was it like to be attached to a project you weren't allowed any knowledge of? How did such a world-changing invention change you, your marriage, your family? These are the questions Nesbitt tackles in this stunning novel, both concise and elliptical. In style, it echoes Julie Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic* (also a first-person-plural account, of the Japanese internment in WWII.) Also like that book, it sheds light on historical events too rarely discussed in literature. This debut is a tour-de-force, in a quiet, careful and winning way. --*Sara Nelson*

and/or--

**Standing by and Making Do: Women of Wartime Los Alamos**, non-fiction, 2008, 152 pages, \$12.50 amazon by [Jane S. Wilson](#) (Editor), [Charlotte Serber](#) (Editor)

**Review:** These skillfully edited first-person accounts are vital to understanding the daily life that supported the work of Manhattan Project scientists at los Alamos. More than sixty years after their writing, the authors' unique standpoints provide historical, social, and cultural details of the internal home front at America's top-secret atomic city that otherwise would have been lost. --Mary Palevsky, author of *Atomic Fragments: A Daughter's Questions*

A fascinating account of what it was like to actually exist in a makeshift place without a name. --Wendy Hoffman, *Los Alamos Monitor*

The essayists are intelligent, witty women whose views are interesting and whose writing is delightful. --Kathleen Manley, *New Mexico History Quarterly*

**Book #4: May 11, 9:30-11:30am**

**Girl with a Pearl Earring by Tracy Chevalier, novel, 2001, 240 pages, \$13 amazon**

**Review:** The scant confirmed facts about the life of Vermeer, and the relative paucity of his masterworks, continues to be provoke to the literary imagination, as witnessed by this third fine fictional work on the Dutch artist in the space of 13 months. Not as erotic or as deviously suspenseful as Katharine Weber's *The Music Lesson*, or as original in conception as Susan Vreeland's interlinked short stories, *Girl in Hyacinth Blue*, Chevalier's first novel succeeds on its own merits. Through the eyes of its protagonist, the modest daughter of a tile maker who in 1664 is forced to work as a maid in the Vermeer household because her father has gone blind, Chevalier presents a marvelously textured picture of 17th-century Delft. The physical appearance of the city is clearly delineated, as is its rigidly defined class system, the grinding poverty of the working people and the prejudice against Catholics among the Protestant majority. From the very first, 16-year-old narrator Griet establishes herself as a keen observer who sees the world in sensuous images, expressed in precise and luminous prose. Through her vision, the personalities of coolly distant Vermeer, his emotionally volatile wife, Catharina, his sharp-eyed and benevolently powerful mother-in-law, Maria Thins, and his increasing brood of children are traced with subtle shading, and the strains and jealousies within the household potently conveyed. With equal skill, Chevalier describes the components of a painting: how colors are mixed from apothecary materials, how the composition of a work is achieved with painstaking care. She also excels in conveying the inflexible class system, making it clear that to members of the wealthy elite, every member of the servant class is expendable. Griet is almost ruined when Vermeer, impressed by her instinctive grasp of color and composition, secretly makes her his assistant, and later demands that she pose for him wearing Catharina's pearl earrings. While Chevalier develops the tension of this situation with skill, several other devices threaten to rob the narrative of its credibility. Griet's ability to suggest to Vermeer how to improve a painting demands one stretch of the reader's imagination. And Vermeer's acknowledgment of his debt to her, revealed in the denouement, is a blatant nod to sentimentality. Still, this is a completely absorbing story with enough historical authenticity and artistic intuition to mark Chevalier as a talented newcomer to the literary scene. Agent, Deborah Schneider.